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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT IMPROVING ACCESS TO CARDIAC SERVICES IN NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO

Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre To Provide Angioplasty Services

THUNDER BAY - The McGuinty government is investing up to $9.4 million in funding this year to improve access to angioplasty services for residents in Northwestern Ontario, Bill Mauro, MPP for Thunder-Bay-Atikokan and Michael Gravelle, MPP Thunder Bay-Superior North, announced today on behalf of Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman.

"The provision of angioplasty services at Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre was a personal commitment of mine leading into the 2003 Provincial Election," said Mauro. "I am thrilled that today represents the culmination of almost four years of work. I want to thank all of those who have helped with this effort and especially the Mended Hearts advocacy group that first brought this issue to my attention."

Today's announcement includes $2.7 million in base funding for Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre to proceed with implementation of its angioplasty service and means services will start as early as this fall. The hospital is expected to perform up to 250 angioplasty procedures by the end of March 2008. Once the service is fully operational the hospital will be able to treat approximately 550 patients per year. An additional $100,000 will support temporary physician services from the University of Ottawa Heart Institute until additional cardiologists are recruited in the area.

"Our government understands the needs of Northwestern Ontario residents who want access to high quality angioplasty services closer-to-home," said Gravelle. "With this new angioplasty service, local residents will have access to important cardiac procedures and treatments when they require it."

As part of this announcement, the McGuinty government is also investing $6.6 million in annual funding for a dedicated critical care air ambulance. This aircraft will be a dedicated resource that would provide immediate transport of patients who experience life threatening difficulties while undergoing angioplasty treatment, to a health care facility offering cardiac surgical services.

"Making angioplasty services available in this area of the province is vital to decreasing waiting times for Northern Ontarians," said Smitherman. "This new cardiac service will be a huge benefit to this community making vital treatments and procedures readily available."

"We are thrilled the government is listening and responding to residents in Northwestern Ontario," said Ron Saddington, President and CEO of Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre. "Through access to cardiac services at our hospital, this funding will ensure a better quality of life for patients."

Angioplasty service is a medical procedure in which a balloon is used to open narrowed or blocked

blood vessels of the heart to treat coronary artery disease. The procedure is an alternative treatment option for patients considered to be high risk for cardiac surgery.

"The establishment of this new program at Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre means residents of the North West Local Health Integration Network will now be able to access angioplasty services without having to travel outside of Northwestern Ontario resulting in more timely treatment closer to home", says John Whitfield, Chair of the North West LHIN.

This is just one more example of how, working together, we can achieve results in health care services for Northwestern Ontario. Other initiatives include:

- Reducing angiography wait times by almost 63 per cent or 32 days;
- Supporting 44,198 additional medical procedures in five key areas (cancer surgery, cardiac procedures, hip and knee replacements, cataract surgery and MRI and CT scans) since 2004;
- Improving access to needed medical services in the north by creating the new Northern Ontario School of medicine which opened in 2005.

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities – keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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